

AL: Did Sir Charles realise his effect on up and coming conservationists?

PF: I think he was amazed at the number of young people he influenced. He never expected to do so but was relieved and pleased when he found some young people getting behind him and that was terrific because Charles often was fighting battles on his own, a lone voice crying in the wilderness. When the Native Forest Action Council came into action, Charles supported them in every way he could, especially he tried to guide them. The Environmental Defence Society followed them, and many other conservation organisations now under the umbrella of ECO came on the NZ scene. Charles' correspondence became terrific as he tried to give help and advice to all who sought it.

I think I was the optimist and Charles the realist. He understood issues and tried to guide everything in the right direction. He was a very shy person and it used to be a strain for him to get up and speak in public. It used to cost him a lot of sleep and worry yet he always rose to the occasion. Many people thought that the heart attack he had about 20 years ago was a result of the fight over Manapouri. He felt things very intensely and the sight of Lake Monowai nearby filled him with horror.

Well, to return to the mention of the Memorial at the Waimeha Lagoon. The brass plate on the lovely greywacke boulder reads "In appreciation of the contribution made by the late Sir Charles Fleming to the Waikanae Community." A very touching tribute from a


small community much loved by our family. The lagoon where the memorial stands is now a Wildlife Reserve. Here Forest and Bird has erected a "hide" which is enjoyed by everyone, even the swallows. Many young families visit it regularly to see the ducks, swans, shags and dabchicks. It is serving an important educational function. Charles worked to save this lagoon and wetland area from being drained and filled for beach housing. Another of his concerns was the estuary at the Waikanae river mouth, the main spawning ground for the fish of the coast. After a battle with developers who thought they could control the river mouth to low water mark, the main part of the estuary was designated a Scientific Reserve now under the management of DoC.



Forest and Bird President Dr Alan Mark receives the Royal Society's inaugural award for environmental work - the Sir Charles Fleming medal - from Royal Society secretary Dr Graeme Stevens. Photo: Otago Daily Times

AL: What are your memories of Sir Charles' public statements on conservation?

PF: I think one of Charles' most powerful speeches was at the 1985 Environmental Forum. He felt so strongly about the need for a really good Department of Conservation. Towards the end of the meeting he rose to speak. Many present will remember. The subject was the scatter of isolated "green dots" (groups working on conservation) through the existing departments of government and the proposal to being them all together in one nature conservancy or Department of Conservation. Charles' final plea to the Environmental Forum was - "If Government could form this big green dot then this little green dot will die happy."

Three daughters and six grandchildren along with me have been influenced by his thoughts - as our oldest daughter puts it - "Life in the Fleming family fostered a deep love of the outdoors; birds, trees, lakes and hills of New Zealand and a lifelong dedication to conservation and wildlife preservation." 

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